

2025

China as a global actor



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## 1. SUMMARY

In this paper it is addressed the activity that **China has deployed against US interests**. The US have published dearly about the attacks that its administration and corporate world have suffered, originating from China.

This is only an example of the activities and interests that **China unveils** through its actions. But it can be extrapolated to the West in general.

Cyber activity is crucial because it reveals the effort that a country shows on the others. Before any attack, involving human resources, takes place, cyber activity boosts. Cyber incidents and its consequences are also a **measure of the likelihood of a physical clash**.

Ukraine serves as an example of it. **Any major offensive is preceded by a surge of cyber activity**.

## 2. RECENT CYBER INCIDENTS STARRED BY CHINESE ACTORS

Chinese cyber actors have been involved in numerous high-profile cyber incidents targeting U.S. infrastructure, government agencies, and private organizations.

The **Salt Typhoon campaign**, linked to China's Ministry of State Security, exploited vulnerabilities in systems such as Ivanti, Fortinet, Sophos, and Microsoft Exchange Server.

This campaign targeted U.S. telecommunications infrastructure, political figures, and **lawful intercept systems**<sup>1</sup>, compromising hundreds of organizations, including eight major telecom firms.

The breaches allowed access to sensitive data such as call records, geolocation information, and **wiretap systems**, with some vulnerabilities dating back to 2018.

Similarly, the **Volt Typhoon** campaign targeted U.S. critical infrastructure, including energy and water sectors, pre-positioning cyber-attacks to disrupt communications during potential conflicts. Other incidents include breaches of cloud-based systems used by U.S. federal agencies and the

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<sup>1</sup> This is why the US has warned Spain of the danger of contracting Huawei to host the Spanish lawful intercept system. This contract cast a shadow on the security of Spanish sensitive information which affects the policy to share information with Spain (the US and EU partners, too).

Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data breach in 2015, which compromised 22.1 million security clearance records.

These operations demonstrate **China's persistent and sophisticated cyber capabilities.**

#### **Assessment of Chinese Cyber Activities**

China is the most active and persistent cyber threat to U.S. networks, employing **advanced espionage techniques** to target sensitive data, intellectual property, and critical systems.

Its objectives include pre-positioning cyber-attacks to disrupt U.S. decision-making and military operations, collecting intelligence on political figures and infrastructure, and undermining U.S. leadership through influence operations. **Methods include exploiting software vulnerabilities, social engineering, and deploying surveillance technologies.**

China also exports surveillance tools globally to **suppress dissent and monitor populations.** The use of generative AI for influence operations and disinformation campaigns further highlights its evolving capabilities.

### **3. FORECAST OF CHINESE CYBER ACTIVITIES**

- 1. Short-Term (2025-2030):** China is expected to intensify targeting of U.S. critical infrastructure, expand cyber espionage operations, and leverage AI and big data analytics for influence campaigns.
- 2. Medium-Term (2030-2040):** The development of more sophisticated cyber tools will likely evade detection and counter U.S. cybersecurity measures. Cyber operations will increasingly integrate with military strategies, targeting satellite communications and defence systems.
- 3. Long-Term (2040-2050):** China aims to achieve cyber dominance through advancements in quantum computing and AI, using these capabilities to support broader geopolitical ambitions, including control over contested regions like Taiwan and the South China Sea.

## 4. CHINESE PLAN FOR 2050 IN CYBER, SPACE, AND DEFENCE

1. **Cyber:** China plans to achieve global cyber dominance by developing cutting-edge technologies such as quantum computing and AI. It aims to expand surveillance and censorship capabilities worldwide and use cyber operations to disrupt adversaries' critical infrastructure and military capabilities.
2. **Space:** By 2050, China seeks to become a world-class space leader, deploying advanced satellite systems for intelligence and reconnaissance. It plans to establish a lunar research station and land astronauts on the Moon by 2030. Space-based counterspace weapons will be developed to target U.S. and allied satellites.
3. **Defence:** China aims to build a fully modernized military by 2035 and a world-class military by 2049. This includes enhancing capabilities for joint operations, missile guidance, autonomous systems, and hypersonic weapons. Overseas military installations will be established to project power globally and protect China's interests.

## 5. FINAL REMARKS

China is making a huge effort to balance the expansion of its **global influence** and its **internal stability**. Its influence is expanding through a growing presence in Africa and Latin America, as well as a strengthened position within Asia.

At the same time China is taking care of building capabilities to **deploy its military force anywhere**. Its interest in building bases in Djibouti or Equatorial Guinea, to name a few, is a clear indicator.

China is developing its military. Its second aircraft carrier will soon be operational, submarine drones are built in huge numbers, 5<sup>th</sup> generation aircrafts are being deployed, military technology developed, and military drills are being carried out to all levels.

**The Chinese armed forces have limited experience with field operations.** Luckily, China has not taken part in any large conflict for decades. This is important because it

determines the mentality of the troops and their chain of command, making them reluctant to make use of the force. Lack of experience always cast a shadow on self-confidence.

**The control of the seas** is also being accomplished by financing in different ways port facilities all over the world. Latin American port facilities have been greatly targeted by China. Its share in the Panama Canal lit a warning light in the US.

**Naval assets are important for China** as its growth depends on safe maritime routes. China must maintain a global presence to secure maritime trade routes.

**The fleet of Chinese tankers** (chemical, oil and gas) surpasses 1,700 vessels (round numbers). The US only has 370 and France counts on 80 vessels. An island as the UK has a fleet of tankers of 280. To assess these figures, different aspects must be taken into account. It must be considered if a country is a producer of those goods, the population of each country, the use of other energy sources in each country or the level of development. But in any case, the **dependence of China of maritime trade is huge** because it is not an energy producing country and its vast population. Its merchant navy is enormous, is growing and requires to be protected anywhere in the world.

It goes without saying that China has many weaknesses. **Corruption**, although fought by Xi Jinping, is likely to remain due to its structural base in the regime. Despite the discontinuation of the one-child policy, **the population continues to decline and age**. Problems to better **distribute wealth**, especially in rural areas.

**Xi is focusing on stability rather than growth**. But it must be a balanced approach. What truly sets China apart is that its rulers are guided by a deliberate and long-term strategy, unlike much of the world. Moreover, Chinese leaders have the will to accomplish it by **2050**.